

**MAYNARD'S ENGLISH
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122. PETER THE GREAT**

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Maynard's English classic series.- No.121-122. Peter the Great by John Lothrop Motley

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PETER THE GREAT.

BY

JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY,

AUTHOR OF "A HISTORY OF THE DUTCH REPUBLIC," "JOHN OF BARNEVELD,"
ETC.

Edited with Introduction and Notes.

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JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY.

JOHN LOTHROP MOTLEY was born in Dorchester, Massachusetts, on April 14, 1814. As a boy he was rather delicate, but fond of skating and swimming. His mother described him as sensitive, excitable, with a quick sense of honor, and scrupulously truthful. His insatiable love of reading showed itself while he was still a schoolboy. In his home-letters he frequently mentions his reading: "I am reading Hume's History of England, and think it very interesting." "I study 'Charles XII.' in French which I think very interesting, and it is much more by its being in French; I can read French books very easily, which I do very often."

At the age of thirteen Motley entered Harvard College. He devoted more time to general literature than to his college work, with the result that at graduation in 1831 he did not obtain the high academic honors which one might expect from a man of his marked ability. It is significant, however, that he was made an honorary member of the Phi Beta Kappa, a college fraternity composed of the leading men in the graduating class.

In 1832 Motley went abroad to study at a German university. At Göttingen he became intimate with Bismarck, the man destined in future years to weld together the numerous petty states of Germany into one great empire. The great chancellor in after-years said of Motley: "The most striking feature of his handsome and delicate appearance was uncommonly large and beautiful eyes. He never entered a drawing-room without exciting the curiosity and sympathy of the ladies."

Six years after his graduation at Harvard, Motley married Miss Benjamin, the sister of Park Benjamin. Two years after his marriage appeared his first published work, an historical novel called "Morton's Hope." This book was not at all successful; its chief interest lies in the fact that its character is largely autobiographical. Motley recognized by the failure of his first book

that he would not succeed as a writer of fiction. Many of his friends advised him to try his hand at history, as his studies in that direction had been long and laborious and he was well fitted by nature for such work. Before committing himself, however, to any of the more important works he had in view, Motley wrote a brilliant essay on Peter the Great for the *North American Review*. It was nominally a review of two works, one on Russia, the other a Life of Peter the Great. Oliver Wendell Holmes in his *Memoir of Motley* says: "If there had been any question as to whether the young novelist who had missed his first mark had in him the elements which might give him success as an author, this essay would have settled the question. . . . The style of the whole article is rich, fluent, picturesque, with light touches of humor here and there, and perhaps a trace or two of youthful jauntiness not quite as yet outgrown." Those who had shaken their heads over the unsuccessful story of "Morton's Hope" were startled by the appearance of this manly and scholarly essay.

As early as 1846 Motley had begun to collect materials for a history of Holland. This was a subject which had long held his sympathy; the analogy between the early struggles of Holland and those of the United States strongly appealed to his warm patriotism. The paucity of material for his work soon drew him to Holland, where he passed some years in arduous literary labor. At length, in 1856, the work was published under the title of "The Rise of the Dutch Republic: a History." Motley at once found himself famous. His book was read in every country of Europe, translated into several languages, and received on both sides of the water with enthusiasm. He subsequently continued his labors in the History of Holland, and became recognized in the Netherlands as a standard authority.

The outbreak of our civil war found Motley in London devoting all his energy to prevent the English government from adopting a hostile attitude toward the North. His two letters to the *London Times* remain as an ineffaceable record of his patriotism and his ability as the champion of liberty and humanity. At a time when English public opinion was trembling in the balance, Motley turned the scale in our favor by his passionate appeal to the English people through the pages of the *Times*. In 1861 President Lincoln appointed him as minister to Austria. He re-

signed this position early in 1867, owing to an offensive letter addressed to him by Mr. Seward, secretary of state. Again in 1869 he accepted a diplomatic position, this time as minister to England. It was with misgivings only too well founded that he entered upon these new duties. His sudden recall in 1870 was never satisfactorily explained. It was a cruel blow to him and his friends, though no stain was left on his reputation. After this he returned to his literary labors again, and in 1874 published the "Life of John of Barneveld," a biography of one of the great figures in Dutch history. From this time on until his death Motley lived in England. His health was affected by the shock of his diplomatic troubles, and he gradually became more and more feeble until his death at Dorchester, England, in 1877.

On the third of June of the same year Dean Stanley delivered a sermon in Westminster Abbey, in which he spoke of Motley as "one of the brightest lights of the Western Hemisphere, the high-spirited patriot, the faithful friend of England's best and purest spirits, the brilliant, the indefatigable historian, who told as none before him had told the history of the rise and struggle of the Dutch Republic. So long as the tale of the greatness of the house of Orange, of the siege of Leyden, of the tragedy of Barneveld, interests mankind, so long will Holland be indissolubly connected with the name of Motley, in that union of the ancient culture of Europe with the aspirations of America, which was so remarkable in the ardent, laborious, soaring soul that has passed away."

CRITICAL OPINIONS.

"They are undoubtedly two important works, the result of profound researches, sincere convictions, sound principles, and manly sentiments. . . . They do honor to American literature, and they would do honor to the literature of any country in the world."—GUIZOT in a review of Motley's "Dutch Republic" and Prescott's "Philip the Second."

"How surprising that so young a man should jump at once, full grown, to fame with a big book, so well studied and complete!"
—WASHINGTON IRVING.

"Unwearying research for years in the libraries of Europe, patience and judgment in arranging and digesting his materials, a fine historical tact, much skill in characterization, the perspective of narration, as it may be called, and a vigorous style unite to make it a very capital work, and place the name of Motley by the side of those of our great American historical trio—Bancroft, Irving, and Prescott."—EDWARD EVERETT.

"All the essentials of a great writer Mr. Motley eminently possesses. His mind is broad, his industry unwearied. In power of dramatic description no modern historian except perhaps Mr. Carlyle surpasses him, and in analysis of character he is elaborate and distinct."—JAMES ANTHONY FROUDE.

Motley's "Peter the Great" "is a narrative rather than a criticism; a rapid, continuous, brilliant, almost dramatic narrative. It shows throughout that the writer has made a thorough study of his subject, but it is written with an easy and abundant yet scholarly freedom, not as if he were surrounded by his authorities and picking out his material piece by piece, but rather as if it were the overflow of long-pursued and well-remembered studies recalled without effort and poured forth almost as a recreation."—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.

PETER THE GREAT.

This essay originally appeared in the *North American Review* for October, 1845.

ONE day, in the year 1697, the great Duke of Marlborough happened to be in the village of Saardam. He visited the dockyard of one Mynheer Calf, a rich shipbuilder, and was struck with the appearance of a journeyman at work there. He was a large, powerful man, dressed in a red woollen shirt and duck trowsers, with a sailor's hat, and was seated, with an adze in his hand, upon a rough log of timber which lay on the ground. The man's features were bold and regular; his dark-brown hair fell in natural curls about his neck; his complexion was strong and ruddy, with veins somewhat distended, indicating an ardent temperament and more luxurious habits than comported with his station; and his dark, keen eye glanced from one object to another with remarkable restlessness. He was engaged in earnest conversation with some strangers, whose remarks he occasionally interrupted, while he rapidly addressed them in a guttural but not unmusical voice. As he became occasionally excited in conversation, his features twitched convulsively, the blood rushed to his forehead, his arms were tossed about with extreme violence of

1. **John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough** (1650-1722). An English general whose military genius has been equalled by few modern soldiers. His greatest victories were Blenheim (1704), Ramillies (1706), Oudenarde (1708), and Malplaquet (1709). Marlborough owed a great part of his political success to his wife, who was a favorite of Queen Anne. Both Marlborough and his wife were unscrupulous in attaining their ends, and although William III. was perfectly aware of this he could not afford to spare Marlborough from his army.

2. **Saardam**. A town of the Netherlands, province of north Holland. It is 5¼ miles N.W. of Amsterdam. The population is chiefly engaged in ship-building and in seafaring occupations.